FILMS: IT MAY BE THE FINAL DAYS OF 'POMPEII'

BUT IT'S A NEW DAWN FOR ADEWALE AKINNUOYE-AGBAJE. PAGE 14

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Tuesday, February 25, 2014 www.metro.us | t: MetroPhilly | f: MetroPhilly

The dirt locker

"Awesome!" A crowd of just under 30 bid on two of Don Tollefson's storage units and his old Chevrolet Blazer Monday morning. **Not "Awesome!"** The former local sportscaster was charged last week with stealing $100,000 from charities and donors. PAGE 02

Local. Temple crew teams given new life
PAGE 03

Gossip. Thicke may have blurred more lines
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Travel. Cure 'polar vortex' blues in Turks and Caicos
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Toy story. The latest playtime trends
PAGE 17

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1 NEWS

Top 3

What's trending online at Metro.us

1 'Justin Bieber's 'Baby' hits one billion views on Vevo'

2 'VIDEO: Men's Olympic speed skating gets remixed with "Mario Kart"'

3 'Hello, and no more Moviefone: Call-in service to be disconnected'

Local tweet

"good on temple for bringing back the rowing/ crew teams! wish everyone could get their teams back, but something is better than nothing."

Well, @_eralc, everything would be better than something.

Dress-up

Sheldon Thomas
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Man poses as district attorney to rob elderly neighbor

A man allegedly bilked a 93-year-old war veteran out of thousands of dollars in part by pretending to be District Attorney Seth Williams.

Prosecutors said Monday that Shelton Thomas, 47, who was arrested Friday, scammed Raymond Campbell, 93, out of at least $95,000 over the past three years.

The veteran hired Thomas to cut his grass in 2011, but Thomas allegedly told Campbell shortly afterward that he was fined for dumping grass clippings in an unauthorized dumpster. Thomas demanded his boss give him money to pay the fine, and then began the pretense that he was the city's district attorney and used the names of city judges to further con his new boss.

Campbell continued to give money to Thomas until last week, when Williams personally went to the victim's home and told him it was a scam.

Thomas is charged with robbery, extortion and identity theft. METRO

Lucky numbers

Lotto ticket wins $1M in Norristown

A Mega Millions ticket sold at a 7-Eleven at 1335 Sandy Hill Rd. hit for $1 million in the Feb. 21 drawing, lottery officials said. METRO

Don Tollefson's stuff was auctioned off at the Public Storage facility on the 400 block of North Columbus Boulevard. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER

Two storage units and car fetch $875

Storage war. A crowd of fewer than 30 bid on two of Don Tollefson's storage units and his old Chevrolet Blazer.

Charges

Tollefson was charged with stealing about $100,000 from more than 100 people over a three-year period.

- Tollefson allegedly collected money for charities, or in exchange for sports trip packages, but pocketed most of the funds instead.
- His preliminary hearing is scheduled for March 6.

Cheap car

$100

The Blazer, a late '80s or early '90s model with its 2002-2003 blue press credential in the upper-left corner of the cracked windshield and chewed potato chips in the back seat, went for $100.

The first locker contained plastic bags, packages of new athletic socks, cardboard boxes and an old, busted jar of Progresso White Clam Sauce.

"He was a hoarder!" said one potential buyer as he took a peek.

The second locker showcased hockey sticks, broken lamps, a wooden "Sussex Cricket Club" sign, plaques acknowledging generosity and a box of youth athletic hats labeled "Cubs."

These were the visible contents of the two storage lockers at the Public Storage facility on the 400 block of North Columbus Boulevard owned by former local sportscaster Don Tollefson, who was charged last week with stealing $100,000 from charities and donors. The lockers, combined with an old and rusty SUV that came without keys or information, fetched $875 at an auction Monday morning.

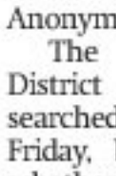
The lockers were auctioned after Tollefson couldn't maintain his rent payments.

After the potential bidders took a quick peek, close to 30 people vied for its contents.

The first unit sold for $100 to a man who only went by Ed. The second unit — dubbed the "hockey stick locker" for its assortment of sports memorabilia and gear — sold for $600 to a man who went by Anonymous E.T.

The Bucks County District Attorney's office searched the two units on Friday, but it isn't clear whether anything was removed.

Tollefson, 61, surrendered to police last week and was sent to Bucks County jail, where he remains, after he couldn't post 10 percent of the mandated $250,000 bail.



TOMMY ROWAN
tommy.rowan@metro.us

Guilty

Ex-cop who robbed dealer pleads guilty to drug charges

The former Philadelphia cop who robbed a drug dealer of $15,000 pleaded guilty Monday in federal court.

Jeffrey Walker, 45, was arrested and charged in May after an undercover FBI operation caught the 24-year veteran planting close to 28 grams of cocaine inside the car of a drug dealer. He faces up to 10 years in prison.

Walker / FILE PHOTO

Because of the arrest, almost 70 drug-related convictions that involved Walker in state court and with the district attorney's office were overturned.

During the federal surveillance sting on May 21, Walker concocted a plan with a federal informant to falsify a drug dealer's arrest.

With the informant's help, Walker targeted a dealer's vehicle parked outside a bar on West Girard Avenue.

After planting the drugs, Walker pulled the driver over once he exited the bar.

During the traffic stop Walker took the driver's house key and, later that night, went to the home and stole $15,000.

Federal officials busted Walker outside. He was fired shortly after his arrest. METRO

USS Somerset lands in Philadelphia

The new USS Somerset, a beach and port landing vehicle that will be commissioned on Saturday at Penn's Landing, was named for the county in western Pennsylvania where Flight 93 crashed on 9/11. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER

Temple crew teams saved by the Lenfest

Reinstated. In December the university cut seven varsity sports. Now it will only lose five.

Two of Temple University's sports teams slated for extinction were given new life Monday afternoon.

Mayor Michael Nutter and Temple President Neil Theobald announced that the old Kelly Drive-based Temple Boathouse, also known as the East Park Canoe House, will receive a $5.5 million makeover.

"The renovation and improvements to the Canoe House will make it possible for Temple University to return men's crew and women's rowing to their former status as varsity sports," Theobald said.

In December five other teams — baseball, softball, men's gymnastics, men's indoor track and field and outdoor track and field — were slated to be cut on July 1.

The city will contribute $2.5 million, while the Lenfest Foundation, headed by noted philanthropist and Temple University Board of Trustees member Gerry Lenfest, tacked on the additional $3 million. The city said the university will have a "long-term lease."

The funding not only pulls the university's men's crew and women's rowing teams back from the brink of elimination, but gives them a proper home. The two teams were forced out of the Canoe House in 2008 because of its dilapidated condition.

The funding will be used to renovate public restrooms as well as office and storage space for the Marine Police. It will also ensure new lockers and boat storage for the Temple crew teams. A parking lot will be rebuilt as well, and the area will be landscaped.

After designs are finalized, Nutter said construction should last between 12 and 18 months.

Nutter said the Schuylkill River and Boathouse Row are iconic landmarks, "and it is incumbent upon us to preserve these historical treasures for future Philadelphians."

TOMMY ROWAN
tommy.rowan@metro.us

The facts

The city also made $1 million available to repair part of the Schuylkill River retaining wall along Kelly Drive.

- A $250,000 state grant will be used to install gardens to help manage storm-water runoff along the Kelly Drive recreation trail beginning at St. Joseph's University Boathouse.
- Temple will now have 19 varsity sports.
- Temple's athletic budget for 2014 is $44 million.
- The changes are expected to save less than $4 million.

Quoted

"The greatest issue facing those two teams was the lack of a cost-effective solution to provide an adequate home on the Schuylkill River." Theobald

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Nataliya L., USA Vein Clinics Patient
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Cheaters. Top 10 most unfaithful areas in Philly will surprise

If your neighborhood is on the top of this list, it's for all the wrong reasons.

AshleyMadison.com, the dating site for married people looking for extra-marital romps, is most popular in Center City and University City. That's according to a statistical breakdown released by the dating site.

They say 118,444 cheaters live in the city of Brotherly Love.

The report also revealed that South Philly cheaters usually have the most children, University City has the most married men seeking available women and about 46 percent of the cheaters in Philadelphia are female, with an average age of 36.

The site boasts 23 million members in 35 countries, all apparently spouses trapped in unhappy marriages and seeking romps outside the home while lacking the guts or means to actually file for divorce. These statistics are based on the highest percentage of active members. METRO

Neighborhoods

Ashley Madison members in respective boroughs:

- Center City, 9.4%
- University City, 7%
- South Philly, 6%
- Camden-Wilmington, 4%
- Olney, 3.5%
- Frankford, 3.3%
- Port Richmond, 3.2%
- Bella Vista, 3%
- Roxborough, 2.8%
- Mayfair, 2.6%

City of Brotherly, and Arborly, Love

Pedestrians walk past a word bubble hanging from a tree on Market Street, which is part of the ongoing Philly Tree campaign. The city's Parks and Recreation Department will again give away free trees this spring. To get your hands on a free young timber, go to www.treephilly.org. But keep in mind there is a limit of two per resident. / CHARLES MOSTOLLER

Hammer attack

Suspect sought for beating W. Philly man

A warrant is out for the arrest of Nathanial Maybin, 29, who is suspected of beating a 46-year-old man with a hammer around 5 p.m., Feb. 20 near 49th Street and Lancaster Avenue. METRO

DUI

Driver who killed Upper Darby High School grad was high

Jonathan Vanderhost, 45, was charged Monday with homicide by vehicle. Tests show he was high on marijuana Jan. 12 when he hit a car that slammed into and killed Dante DeSimone, 18. METRO

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AG seeks standard to protect against consumer ID theft

Industry. Federal laws don't regulate how retailers handle data security.

Attorney General Eric Holder, citing the recent massive data theft at retailer Target Corp., urged Congress on Monday to enact a national standard for notifying consumers about such breaches.

"This would empower the American people to protect themselves if they are at risk of identity theft," Holder said in a statement urging congressional action. "It would enable law enforcement to better investigate these crimes — and hold compromised entities accountable when they fail to keep sensitive information safe."

Data thefts at Target and luxury retailer Neiman Marcus Group LLC have rekindled enthusiasm in Congress for a single federal law on how customers should be notified about such breaches. But those efforts face the same roadblock as in the past: Dozens of overlapping state laws are already in place.

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have passed their own laws that tell companies when and how consumers have to be alerted to data breaches and what qualifies as a breach.

Negotiations over fitting state standards under an umbrella federal law therefore face a tug of war among companies, consumer advocates and state authorities.

The National Retail Federation in a January letter to Congress restated its decade-old position in favor of a nationwide standard that would preempt state rules. REUTERS

Quoted

"It's time for leaders in Washington to provide the tools we need to do even more. ... I'm calling on Congress to create a strong, national standard for quickly alerting consumers whose information may be compromised." Holder

Budget cuts slash Army to smallest since before WWII

The Pentagon said on Monday it would shrink the Army to pre-World War II levels, eliminate the A-10 aircraft and reduce military benefits in order to meet 2015 spending caps, setting up an election-year fight with Congress over defense priorities. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, discussing the Pentagon's plan for meeting its new spending caps ahead of the budget presentation on March 4, advanced a number of ideas that have been attempted in the past but rejected by Congress or are seen as unpopular in a congressional election year. REUTERS / GETTY IMAGES

Health care

Ark. lawmakers to vote on funds for alternative to Obamacare

Arkansas lawmakers will try once again this week to provide funding for the state's Private Option medical insurance plan that has drawn interest from lawmakers in other states as an alternative to Obamacare.

The Arkansas Senate approved the $915 million appropriation for the Private Option plan last week, but the House narrowly rejected it in several votes last week. Gov. Mike Beebe said failure to pass the funding could blow a hole in the budget.

He warned that failure to pass the funding could lead to a loss of $89 million in projected savings coming from the Private Option, prompting drastic cuts in services. REUTERS

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NRA cases

High court leaves gun control laws intact

The Supreme Court on Monday declined to wade into the politically volatile issue of gun control by leaving intact three court rulings rejecting challenges to federal and state laws.

The court's decision not to hear the cases represented a loss for gun rights advocates, including the National Rifle Association, which was behind two of the challenges. REUTERS

Too young

18-20

The first case involved a challenge by the NRA to a Texas law that prevents 18- to 20-year-olds from carrying handguns in public. It also raised the broader question of whether there is a broad right under the Second Amendment to bear arms in public.

Texas Hold 'Em

Supreme Court declines to hear poker case appeal

The Supreme Court on Monday said it will not decide whether poker is a contest of skill or luck, meaning people can still be prosecuted under federal law for organizing games.

The court said it would not hear an appeal filed by Lawrence DiCristina, who was convicted under the law, the Illegal Gambling Business Act, for running games of "Texas Hold 'Em" at a warehouse in Staten Island, N. Y. REUTERS

POKER, SKILL OR LUCK?
COLOURBOX

Justices question Obama climate change regulations

EPA. One outcome would preserve most of the program for facilities that already emit other pollutants.

A plume of exhaust extends from the Mitchell Power Station, along the Monongahela River, 20 miles southwest of Pittsburgh. / GETTY IMAGES

The U.S. Supreme Court appeared closely divided on Monday over whether the administration of President Barack Obama exceeded its authority in trying to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

Justice Anthony Kennedy would seem to hold the swing vote on the nine-member high court, with conservative justices skeptical of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's approach and liberal justices generally supportive.

Kennedy offered some criticism of the government's position but did not indicate which way he would vote.

Kennedy clashed with the Obama administration's lawyer, Solicitor General Donald Verrilli, over some of the government's legal arguments.

The justices are weighing just one aspect of the administration's first wave of climate change regulations, focusing on whether the agency has authority under the Clean Air Act to regulate greenhouse gases under a program for stationary sources of pollution, such as power plants.

The court has various options if it finds fault with the government's conclusion that greenhouse gases should be regulated under the "prevention of serious deterioration," (PSD program) which requires a new or modified major polluting facility to obtain a permit before any new construction is done if it emits "any air pollutant." The program requires facilities to install the best technology to control emissions of specific pollutants. REUTERS

EPA

Several justices questioned whether a loss for the EPA would be much of a setback.

- Chief Justice John Roberts, one of the conservatives, cited a court filing by the American Chemistry Council, one of the challengers, which said that if the court rules narrowly, 83 percent of greenhouse gas emissions that could potentially be regulated under EPA's interpretation of the law would still be covered, compared with the 86 percent of emissions that the EPA says it wants to regulate.

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1. Viagra Prescribing Information, Revised January 2010 2. Cialis Prescribing Information, Revised October 2011 3. Levitra Prescribing Information, Revised November 2011 4. European Society for Sexual Medicine (ESSM) Website, downloaded 11/14/12. 5. AMS 700® with MS Pump® Inflatable Penile Prosthesis Instructions for Use (IFU)

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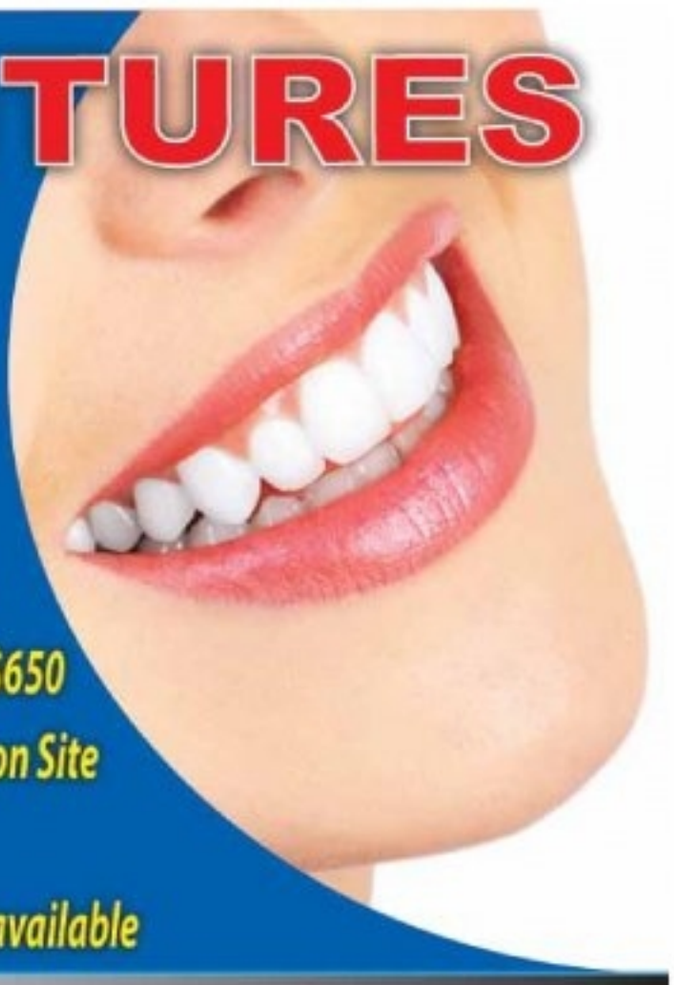

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Women sing the Ukrainian national anthem in Independence Square on Monday in Kiev, Ukraine. / GETTY IMAGES

Economic advisers to go with State Department's William Burns to Kiev

Support. Treasury Sec. Jack Lew spoke with Arseny Yatsenyuk, a member of Ukraine's interim leadership.

Treasury officials and economic advisers will accompany Deputy Secretary of State William Burns on a trip to Ukraine this week as the country struggles to form a new government and rescue its economy after the removal of its Russia-allied president.

The State Department said representatives from Treasury and the National Economic Council would travel with Burns on the visit to Ukraine today and Wednesday.

Representatives said in a statement they would work with European Union and International Monetary Fund representatives to discuss financial support while the new government "implements the difficult steps necessary to reform the economy."

Ukraine's interim leadership pledged to put the country back on course for European integration now that President Viktor Yanukovich had been ousted. Authorities issued an arrest warrant for Yanukovich on Monday.

Burns, whose trip had been previously announced and will include a stop in Istanbul on Monday, will meet with Ukrainian political leaders, the business community and civil society representatives. REUTERS

Quoted

"He will urge the rapid formation of a national unity government that represents the wide array of stakeholders in Ukraine's domestic political discourse, and encourage immediate steps to undertake the critical reforms necessary to restore Ukraine's political and economic health." The State Department

Penalties for homosexuality

White House says Uganda takes step backward by signing gay legislation

The White House sharply criticized Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni on Monday for signing legislation that imposes harsh penalties for homosexuality, calling it a step backward.

The new law strengthened existing punishments for anyone caught having gay sex, imposing jail terms of up to life for "aggravated homosexuality," including sex with a minor or while HIV positive.

"Instead of standing on the side of freedom, justice and equal rights for its people, today, regrettably, Ugandan President Museveni took Uganda a step backward by signing into law legislation criminalizing homosexuality," White House spokesman Jay Carney said in a statement.

His statement did not say whether U.S. assistance to Uganda would be suspended. An official said last week aid would be reviewed if Museveni signed the law. REUTERS

Study. Anti-gay communities linked to shorter lives

People who are gay, lesbian or bisexual tend to die earlier in communities where citizens are less accepting of same-sex relationships, according to a new study.

"The size of the relationship between anti-gay prejudice and mortality was large," Mark Hatzenbuehler told Reuters.

"This research indicates that reducing prejudice may improve the life expectancy of sexual minorities in the United States," he added in an email.

Hatzenbuehler is the study's lead author from the Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University.

He and his colleagues write in the journal Social Science and Medicine that although it has been thought that the amount of prejudice or stigma in a community is tied to the health of its residents, it has been hard to measure stigma. REUTERS

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NCUA

Will work for travel money

Jobs. Meet Angelica Wilk, who works two jobs so she can see the world.

We all know living in a city is expensive. How does the average person make it work? Our new series features people working more than one job to make ends meet.

Tell me about your jobs.
My full-time job is with the Behavioral Health Agency. I work from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, with mentally ill individuals. They come to the agency through the court system, meaning they have a present criminal history or have been incarcerated in the past. I help link them up with psychiatry services, treatment programs, housing and anything else they might need.

I work a second job Monday through Thursdays, from 5 p.m. to about 7 p.m., helping them adjust to their new way of living.

And you also do travel writing on the side?
Yes. I love traveling and one of the perks of working in health care is that you get so many vacation days, so I started traveling and started a travel blog. That's freelance work I do in my spare time. I write for a travel website for women on a regular basis and also pitch articles to other websites.

Where have you traveled?
Mostly the Caribbean, but I've traveled to Europe as well. I'm going to Australia on Friday. I take four- or five-day vacations about four times a year.

Do you work your second job so you can afford to travel?
Yes. I do it to afford more of the lifestyle I want. I definitely wouldn't be able to travel if I didn't have a second job. Working in health care, you don't get the benefit of a high salary, but you get the benefit of helping others, so I do more to make ends meet and also to enjoy the luxuries in life.

Do you think your relationship with your boyfriend moved faster so you could save money and share rent, or would you have decided to live together anyway?
I would have moved in with him and his roommates anyway, but we are trying to find our own apartment (without roommates) and that would have happened sooner if we were more financially stable.

Overall, are you happy with your lifestyle or are you hoping to cut down to one job?
I'm happy right now, but I wish I could make more money working the same amount. Ideally, I would like to make more money at my full-time job so I didn't have to work as much and could write more freelance travel pieces. I want travel writing to play a bigger role in my life.

SECOND SHIFT

Creative ways city dwellers make ends meet

EMILY LAURENCE
Contact us if you have a story to tell: emily.laurence@metro.us

The stats

Angelica Wilk
Age: 27
Home: East Williamsburg, Brooklyn
Lives With: Boyfriend and two roommates
Number of jobs: 2

Angelica Wilk uses her weekends to write travel articles and, oh yeah, to relax. / ANGELICA WILK

Q&A

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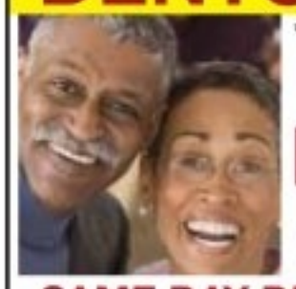

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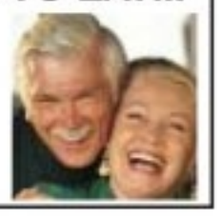

Apps to help with filing your taxes

Finance. Because of course there's an app for that. In fact, there are several.

From traditional filing services that have migrated to phones and tablets, to apps that break things down and help you find hidden deductions, these programs can make doing your taxes easier than ever. We rounded up the best ones:

SnapTax

Available for iOS and Android, free
Made by TurboTax, this new app allows you to file your taxes from your phone in a really speedy way. All you do is snap a photo of your W-2 and answer a questionnaire. That's it. This app is geared toward people who make less than $100,000, don't own a home and only have W-2, interest or unemployment income. If you don't fall into those categories, you should file through traditional TurboTax or another way because your taxes are a little more complicated. While the app is free, there is a $24.99 fee to file from your phone.

Try this

TurboTax

Available for iPad, free
The most popular tax preparation website is now available as an iPad app. Just like the website, the app breaks down filing into a simple step-by-step process that's extremely easy to follow. Even if this is your first time filing taxes on your own, this simple app should help you get the hang of it. You can file both federal and state returns through the app. TurboTax does charge a fee of $29.99 for filing federal taxes, and a separate fee for filing state taxes.

Bloomberg BNA's Quick Tax Reference

Available for iOS, Android and BlackBerry, free
You don't need one of those bulky tax code reference books to look up pensions, gift taxes or whatever else you have questions about — just use this app. It also can quickly calculate your taxable income.

TaxSlayer

Available for iOS and Android, free
Once you've filed your taxes, you really just want to know when the heck your refund will arrive, right? This app keeps track of it for you. You can find out the status of your refund and when you can expect your checks for both federal and state taxes.

EMILY LAURENCE
emily.laurence@metro.us

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Making drop-out rates drop

Quitting. A new one-hour class looks to keep first-generation college students enrolled in school.

A new program may lead to less-frustrated first-generation students. / PHOTODISC

First-generation college students get lower grades and are more likely to drop out — an "achievement gap" that threatens efforts to boost the number of college graduates.

Recent research, however, suggests a simple one-hour intervention that focuses on students' social-class backgrounds could help close the divide.

In an experiment at an unnamed elite private college, incoming students listened to college juniors and seniors discuss how their social class backgrounds affected their college experience, according to the paper "Closing the Social Class Achievement Gap," to be published in Psychological Science. The attendees and the panelists were a mix of "first-generation" students — those whose parents lacked college degrees — and "continuing generation" students whose parents had college educations.

The first-generation students who attended this "diversity education" panel subsequently earned higher grades and were more likely to use campus resources such as tutoring than first-generation students who attended a panel about adjusting to college life that didn't include the panelists' stories about social class background, the researchers found.

In fact, the achievement gap between first-generation students who attended the diversity panel and their continuing-generation peers shrank by 63 percent, according to researchers.

When talking about making the transition to college, one continuing-generation panelist said it was hard to adjust to more rigorous academics and leaving family, while a first-generation panelist talked about how exhausting it was pretending everything was fine.

The diversity panel also had benefits for the continuing-generation students. Both first-generation and continuing-generation students reported less stress and anxiety, better adjustment to college life, more social engagement and increased recognition of multiple perspectives.

First-generation students often come from less affluent backgrounds and may struggle with the "middle class" environment of college, said one of the researchers, Nicole M. Stephens, of Northwestern University. "Middle-class and upper-class students know that asking for help is what it takes to succeed," Stephens said. "Lower-class students might think they have to figure it out on their own."

For Stephens, it's about more than money. "In addition to needing financial resources and academic skills, students also need to learn how to navigate and overcome the cultural obstacles that they often experience in university settings." REUTERS

By the numbers

6/10

Six out of 10 of the first-generation students in the study received Pell Grants, federal aid for the neediest families, compared to fewer than one in 10 of the continuing education students.

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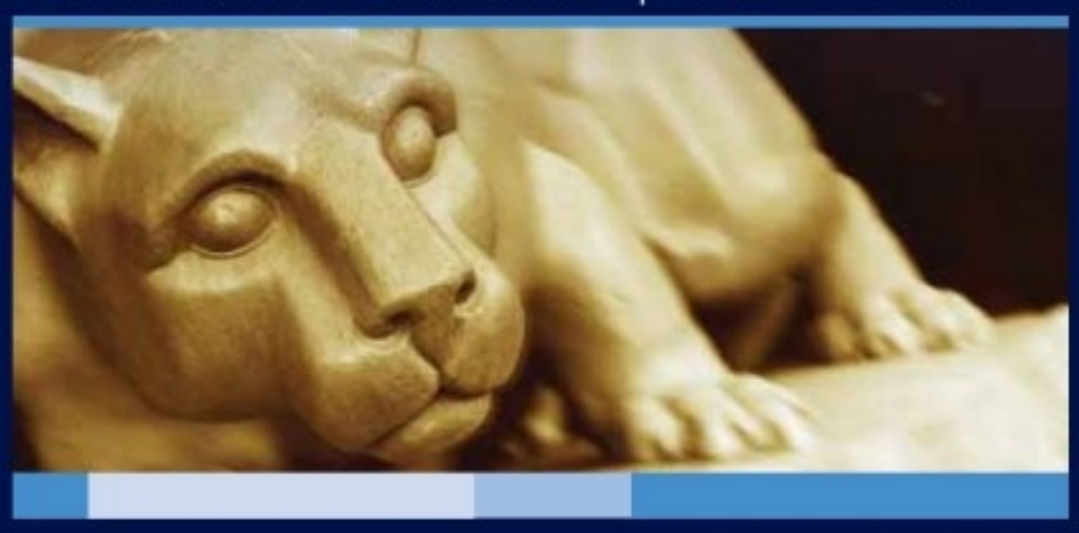

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Alec Baldwin resigns from famousness

You won't have Alec Baldwin to kick around anymore! / ALL PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

Here is a partial list of things and people Alec Baldwin slams in New York Magazine's cover story: the paparazzi, homophobes, people who think Alec Baldwin is a homophobe, "CSI," a man in Hawaii who answers the phone rudely, Shia LaBeouf, Rachel Maddow, Broadway, New York, America, the world, 2013.

Baldwin has penned a lengthy piece that is purportedly his resignation from public life, but the bulk of it is essentially a rebuttal to everything you've read or heard about him in the past year. Everything, from his failed attempt to co-star with Shia LaBeouf on Broadway to his canceled MSNBC show to allegations that he'd used a gay slur, is addressed and found to be the fault of a vicious paparazzi culture whose main purpose is to make Alec Baldwin look bad.

Baldwin keeps returning to one episode: An incident in 2013 when a photographer tried to take a picture of Baldwin and his baby daughter, and the actor chased him down the street cussing him out. According to TMZ, Baldwin used a gay slur directed at him. Baldwin insists that's not true, but he blames the fact that he's been falsely labeled a homophobe for everything from the cancellation of his MSNBC show (well, he also blames Rachel Maddow for that) to the fact that he probably can't run for mayor of New York now.

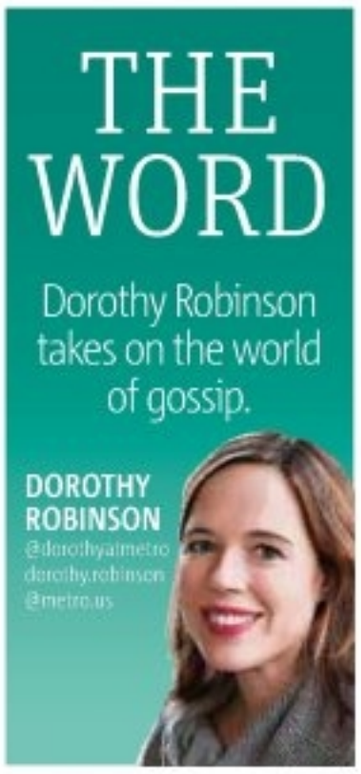
I would have slightly more sympathy for Baldwin's plight if he hadn't used the word "tranny" in the article. Still, the piece is amusing for exactly the thing Baldwin claims to deplore: celebrity gossip. Shia LaBeouf screamed at him for not knowing his lines! Rachel Maddow viewed him as "equivalent to Mel Gibson"! Juicy, Baldwin. Tell us more.

MELINDA TAUB

Pot, kettle

Dishing on LaBeouf

Regarding LaBeouf, with whom Baldwin worked on the Broadway production of "Orphans" before the younger star was fired: "He had that card, that card you get when you make films that make a lot of money that gives you a certain kind of entitlement," he claimed. "LaBeouf seems to carry with him, to put it mildly, a jailhouse mentality wherever he goes," he continued.



Harold Ramis dead at 69

Many comics choose to work in one field. Harold Ramis wound up in three. A writer, director and actor (and producer, and even, once or twice, songwriter), Ramis was a fixture of underground and mainstream comedy who had his hands in "Stripes," "Ghostbusters" and "Groundhog Day."

Ramis died Monday, at the age of 69, from complications of autoimmune inflammatory vasculitis, a rare disease involving the swelling of blood vessels. Ramis had been ill since 2010.

He found his greatest success with movies. He was on the writing teams responsible for "Meatballs," "Animal House," "Caddyshack" and "Stripes." He also acted in the latter, sharing the foreground with Bill Murray, with whom he would reunite for "Ghostbusters," in which he played unfailingly nerdy Egon Spengler.

Ramis' death robs us of the long-promised/threatened "Ghostbusters 3," which has spent at least 25 years in development hell. Dan Aykroyd had always been keen to do it, while Bill Murray had been very keen not to do it. Ramis' passing all but assures that we were spared of that threequel, however you'd like to interpret that verb.

MATT PRIGGE

Pour out some Ecto Cooler for Ramis.

Splitsville

Thicke and Patton are separating

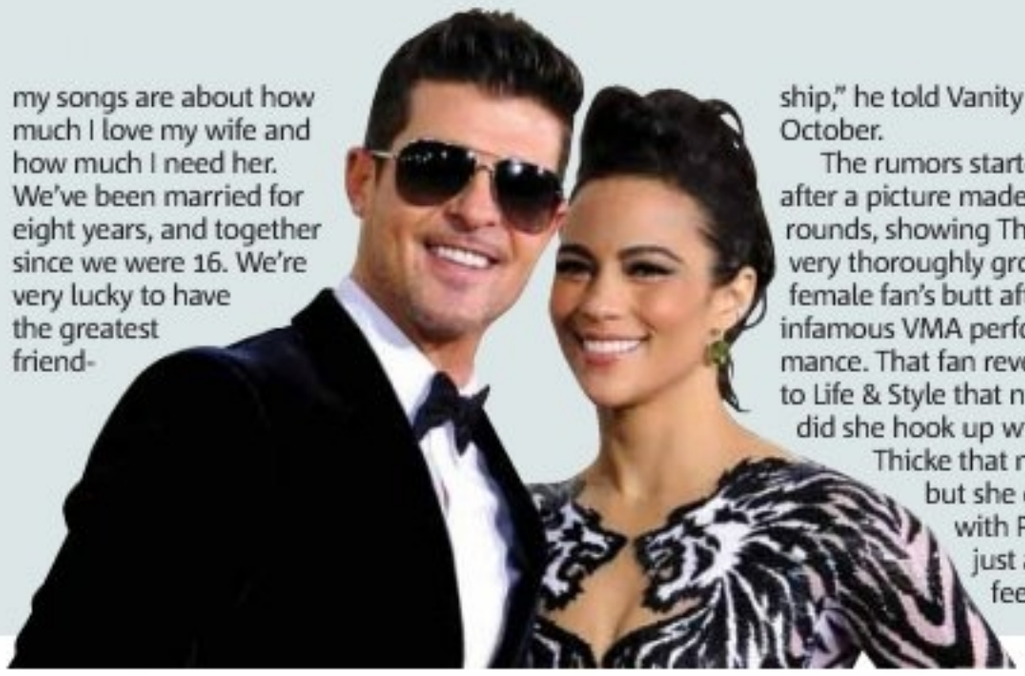
After months of whispers that Robin Thicke has been unfaithful to his wife Paula Patton, the celebrity duo dropped the bombshell yesterday that they are splitting up after two decades together.

"We will always love each other and be best friends," the singer and his actress wife told Us Weekly in a statement. "However, we have mutually decided to separate at this time."

Thicke, 36, and Patton, 37, are parents to son Julian, 3, and have been married since 2005.

Thicke sky-rocketed to fame last year with his hit "Blurred Lines," but once in the public eye, rumors of his cheating ways began to hound the singer — all of which he denied. "Seventy-five percent of my songs are about how much I love my wife and how much I need her. We've been married for eight years, and together since we were 16. We're very lucky to have the greatest friendship," he told Vanity Fair in October.

The rumors started after a picture made the rounds, showing Thicke very thoroughly groping a female fan's butt after his infamous VMA performance. That fan revealed to Life & Style that not only did she hook up with Thicke that night, but she did it with Patton just a few feet away.



Twitter feed

We check in with some of Hollywood's biggest names to see what they've been up to — in their own words, in 140 characters or fewer.

Almost as quickly as news broke that Piers Morgan will be stepping away from his prime time show on CNN, Twitter weighed in on what he should pursue in his next gig. The hashtag #PiersMorgansNextJob was trending Monday. Here are some of the best tweets:

@DCiphered: chauffeur for Bob Costas. #PiersMorgansNextJob

@Alekonakai: Co-Host on The View #PiersMorgansNextJob

@Reenit: Master Bidet Health Faucet Repairman #PiersMorgansNextJob

@Havana_Browns: @piersmorgan we are currently hiring bar staff. Please forward CV #PiersMorgansNextJob

@betzbella: #PiersMorgansNextJob Servant for the Crawley family on #DowntonAbbey

Alain de Botton's new book, "The News: A User's Manual," is a thought-provoking look at the purpose of news. / GETTY IMAGES

ALAIN DE BOTTON

We talk to one of the world's most famous philosophers about his mission to challenge how we consume news.

TURNING TABLOIDS INTO ART

Philosophy's closest thing to a pop star, Alain de Botton, has mainstreamed his discipline through millions of book sales, TV shows and sold-out events. Even One Direction's Harry Styles is a fan (and friend).

Having already examined sex and spirituality, de Botton's latest focus is news, launching The Philosophers' Mail, an intellectual version of The Daily Mail that mocks the world's most popular news site by adding depth to its guilty pleasure splashes. Headlines such as "Interview with David Beckham's soul" and "Kiev is in flames and I don't care" challenge readers to consider their media diet.

We spoke to de Botton in London after the release of his new book, "The News: A User's Manual."

What concerns you about news and how we are consuming it?
The hope for news is that it will help us to live better lives and help our countries be better places by being more informed. Information should bring improvements, but that's not happening for a range of reasons.

What is the negative impact?
Sometimes it's a negative impact, sometimes a missed opportunity. The classic test is: Do you remember what was in the news last week? Most people can't. Our memory for information is very bad, which is a sign we're not being properly guided; We're being flooded with news and that's a problem. We have a hard time focusing on things that might

matter, but it doesn't mean everything has to be earnestly serious. I'm a great believer in material from popular news, but I'm not sure it's being handled properly.

How difficult is it to make philosophy accessible?
I'm really interested in bite-size. [Friedrich] Nietzsche and [Ludwig] Wittgenstein wrote in morsels; there's nothing wrong with trying to express an idea in 200 words. With The Philosophers' Mail we're trying to capture the news you would read in the Daily Mail, but use it as a springboard to something more profound.

You have stories about pedophiles, celebrities, etc. Is the aim to feature the most-clicked material?
Absolutely, we're really interested in being popular. What we want to do is to surprise people once they've clicked, and then stretch their ideas. But we don't see anything wrong with being responsive to clicks.

Q&A

How did The Daily Mail react to your spoof site?
We're really hoping they'll sue us because it would be a nice story, but they're too sensible. We have their ex-features editor, and he says they don't care. The book has upset some people — which I didn't intend. They think, "Who is this guy? He doesn't understand." Newspapers like to present themselves as infallible, but I think they should be open to criticism from outsiders.

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The faces of others

Interview. Godfrey Reggio and Jon Kane talk about the best way to watch their new film "Visitors."

In 1983, Godfrey Reggio — a monk turned filmmaker — scored a surprise hit with "Koyaanisqatsi," a super-sized art film spectacular that featured wordless images of nature and cities against a maddening Philip Glass score. It had a message: Man had either destroyed the planet or conquered it. "Visitors," his fourth feature, is tougher to pin down. It has images of human faces, and every now and then a gorilla or a building.

Reggio insists seeking meaning is not the way into "Visitors." "Poetic cinema is not based on logic," he says. "It doesn't appeal to your head. It's not about an idea. What I try to say is if you're going into this thing looking for meaning, you could miss the whole film. I would recommend you be like a traveler, just sit down and take in the sights."

"It's like a deprogramming process," says Jon Kane, the film's editor and assistant director. The film has elements of abstraction, Kane explains. "But we're creating images that are for the most part not abstract. In fact our main images are the most familiar thing ever, which is the human face."

But there is a message, albeit a more general one, and one that ties in with "Koyaanisqatsi." "We're on speed and rush hour in our future, so this film is like 'Whoa,'" Reggio states. "You're not used to being this slow. It makes us nervous to have something so slow in front of us."

"It's also a twist to have something slow be so confrontational," Kane adds. "Confrontation involves energy. This does a jujitsu on that idea. You end up looking at yourself, in a way."

Jon Kane and Godfrey Reggio collaborated on the new maximalist art film, "Visitors." / GETTY IMAGES

Quoted

"It's like a deprogramming process. But we're creating images that are for the most part not abstract. In fact our main images are the most familiar thing ever, which is the human face."

Kane

Here's a tip

How to see it

"Visitors" will be shown in special screenings around the world, sometimes with a large orchestra. But even seeing it in a theater during the week, when audience turnout tends to be low or nonexistent, works, too. "This is a great film to see by yourself, because it's very personal," Reggio says. "I'm recommending people go when only a few people are in the theater. It's a solitary experience as well as a social experience.

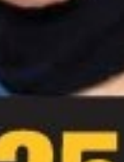
"The scale can envelop the audience, because the room is dark and it's a social event," he says. "But it's a social event in silence. There are very few social events we do in silence. Maybe a funeral."

Showtime

What he watches

Reggio says he's never watched many films. "I'm not saying I haven't seen films. But I'm not a devotee," he admits. He watches the occasional old movie, plus basketball. "I do watch sports, because it's live and that's interesting to me."

Kane does tell Reggio he's not being entirely truthful: "You introduced me to 'Homeland.'"



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What's in a name?

Interview. Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje talks playing an honorable gladiator in "Pompeii."

Nearly every profile of the English actor Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje begins with his name. It's not one that rolls off the tongue — unless you know how to pronounce it. But far more imposing is Akinnuoye-Agbaje's presence. On "Oz," where he played Simon Adebisi, and on "Lost," as Mr. Eko, he embodied fearsome characters — not always evil, but always using their imposing presence to get what they wanted.

In "Pompeii," a 3-D adventure about the events leading up to the disastrous eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79, Akinnuoye-Agbaje plays a gladiator, and a pretty nice one — or about as nice as a warrior forced to fight for his life can be. "Although he's ferocious in what he does, he kills because he has to. There's still this humanity and humility to him," Akinnuoye-Agbaje says.

"He does what he has to do with dignity and honor. Gladiators should not stab each other in the back, you know? He's really adamant about how one should die."

In the film, he slowly befriends one of the men he may have to kill: our hero, Milo (Kit Harington, of "Game of Thrones"). Their mutual respect soon overwhelms their fear about facing each other in battle. "How do you live with somebody you know you're going to kill tomorrow? How do you sleep, with one eye open? Are you testing them for their weaknesses? It was an interesting dynamic."

Quoted

"My favorite movies growing up were 'Ben-Hur' and 'Spartacus.' I remember Woody Strode [in 'Spartacus']. He was a great black gladiator. He just stood out like Adonis." Akinnuoye-Agbaje

Akinnuoye-Agbaje admits he only knew as much about the destruction of Pompeii as the rest of us — namely, that it was destroyed by a volcano. But his research took other avenues. "What fascinated me was how an African could end up in Italy. I tried to trace the steps and look back and see where he would have come from. I know that the southern tip of Europe and the northern tip of Africa were joined and it was more of a fluid channel for the Romans to go through and conquer and colonize these African empires like Mauritania, Liberia, Sudan. We tried to put some of that influence of these cultures into the film by having him pray."

The film also gave him the chance to star in a Roman epic. "My favorite movies growing up were 'Ben-Hur' and 'Spartacus,'" he says. "I remember Woody Strode [in 'Spartacus']. He was a great black gladiator. He just stood out like Adonis."

Akinnuoye-Agbaje is currently trying to direct a film, "Farming," based on his experience as a Nigerian child adopted by a white English family. He hopes the financing will be in place this year. In the meantime he's trying to play more than just villains.

"I always enjoy playing somebody that could be perceived as 'dark,'" Akinnuoye-Agbaje explains. "I never see them as 'bad' per se. If you do that, you run the danger of making your character a caricature."

ADEWALE AKINNUOYE-AGBAJE GETS TO DO SOME FINE FIGHTING IN "POMPEII." GETTY IMAGES

Working out

In training

Akinnuoye-Agbaje's training regimen consisted not only of extensive workouts but a strict diet. Snapping out of that physical work after a shoot can be difficult. "Even though I wanted to eat junk, the body rejected it," he recalls, laughing. "Even today, I'm on a similar diet — not as strict, but similar. It's very functional to my lifestyle and it gives me the maximum energy. It was a great benefit. I learned how to maximize my energy."

MATT PRIGGE
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Quiet Caribbean paradise

The Gansevoort in Providenciales is on Grace Bay, a top-rated beach. / PROVIDED

Serenity now. Go to Turks and Caicos before everyone knows about it.

Looking for an action-packed adventure with ruins to hike, historic towns to tour and tons of local culture? You've come to the wrong place. But if you're dying to escape this year's vicious winter for a few days and laze on a beautiful beach, with no pressure to do anything but work on your tan, head to the Turks and Caicos island of Providenciales.

Just 3.5 hours flying direct from New York, Provo, as those in the know call it, is the most developed of the country's islands, located in the Caicos part of Turks and Caicos. But that's still not saying much in this sleepy chain.

Grace Bay, one of the top-rated beaches in the world, is home to a handful of high-end hotels, including the Gansevoort, a sleek option with an urban vibe different from many other Caribbean resorts. "We try to stay away from wicker," joked Jorge Collazo, regional director of sales and marketing at Gansevoort Hotel Group.

Instead, you'll enter the hip hotel via a minimalist open-air lobby and walk through to the 7,000-square-foot courtyard pool, flanked by lounge chairs and "lounging islands" set out over the water. The gym and spa are to the right; the restaurant, Stelle, is on the left.

Up ahead is the beach, which is open to the public. But since the hotel is set slightly apart, there's less foot traffic. The sand is white, soft and clean — hotel staff sweep the beach in the mornings, and there's even a wooden rack just before the beach where you're expected to stash your flip-flops.

If the thought of more than a couple of hours lazing under an umbrella in the sand makes you antsy, sign up for a boat trip to check out the snorkeling over Bight Reef in Princess Alexandra National Park, just off Provo. If you're lucky, one of the crew will dive down to score a few conch (pronounced "konk") and slice off a bite for you to try.

For those who prefer food prepared in a kitchen, behind the scenes, head to Da Conch Shack, where you can order conch frittered, fried, curried, ceviched or tossed in a stew or salad. The mollusk is considered an aphrodisiac — so watch who you eat it around.

RACHEL VIGODA
rachel.vigoda@metro.us

Rooms at the Gansevoort, like this oceanfront studio, are Caribbean chic. / PROVIDED

PLUS

Turndown service

Where to stay

The Gansevoort Turks & Caicos definitely isn't cheap, but with impeccably maintained rooms, top-notch service (including pillowcases embroidered with your initials), exquisite views from oceanfront balconies and the onsite Exhale spa, it's worth the splurge for a long weekend.

Age: 5 years

Number of rooms: 91 (84 oceanfront, seven facing the pool)

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Theatrics on the runway

Fashion Week diary

Follow our editors' diaries as they take you to the front row of Milan Fashion Week. For more coverage, visit www.metro.us and www.modmods.com.

Sunday

2:19 p.m. Stefano Gabbana and Domenico Dolce have generously gifted each guest with tiny **Dolce & Gabbana** purses. And now there is some serious haggling going on over it. No one even notices that the show is now running nearly half an hour late. Well played, boys!

2:32 p.m. The velvet curtains at the foot of the runway open to reveal an extravagant set: an enchanted forest, complete with an enormous rotating tree that rises from the floor and falling snow. "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" plays in the background and the show begins. With that, Dolce & Gabbana manage to top both Prada's live orchestra and Roberto Cavalli's fireworks. If there were an award show devoted to the month of fashion, Dolce & Gabbana would win Best Stage Design. It's fashion as theater.

The La Scala-worthy set makes a fantastical backdrop for equally stunning clothes: dramatic medieval-inspired chiffon gowns float behind the models, A-line coats are densely embroidered with floral and forest animal prints and the duo's trademark Sicilian lace dresses. Most of the looks come topped off with ornate Arthurian hoods, which make the models look like modern day Snow Whites, Red Riding Hoods and Guineveres. The question is, what woman of any age wants to look like a modern-day Snow White? A fairy tale princess doesn't exactly read fashion. But the cleverness of this show is that underneath all of the theatrical elements that make us sit up and take notice, between those runway-only pieces that border on costume, are beautifully crafted dresses in gorgeous fabrics. And who can't appreciate that?

DSquared2

The designer

DSquared2

- **The mood:** Loony bin chic
- **The major trends:** Capes, bedazzled everything, Sixties shapes and feathers

Monday

9:48 a.m. The curtains open at **DSquared2** and we're suddenly back in the Sixties in a mental institution (or rehab facility?) where Malaika Firth and her equally well-dressed friends are waiting to be discharged. They look like they were arrested mid-party and sent away, only to be let go months later in the same glamorous cocktail dresses they came in wearing. It's camp and completely awesome, even if the clothes don't look original or new. Firth, who opens the show, strolls down the catwalk in a messy bouffant, jewels, gloves and a feather jacket draped over her shoulders — giving her best Liz Taylor fresh-out-of-rehab face — with nurses trailing behind her.

There's also a trace of Lindsay Lohan in there, with strappy heels that look suspiciously like parole house-arrest anklets and bedazzled arm candy that faintly resembles handcuffs.

The Caten brothers have recently opened a store in L.A. — and this collection has plenty of celeb bait. Kim, Khloe, Paris and Miley's names may as well be written on the backs of these frocks in glitter.

The designer

Dolce & Gabbana

- **The mood:** The Brothers Grimm take a shopping spree on Via Monte Napoleone — aka, Snow White gets a makeover by Dolce & Gabbana
- **The major trends:** Gold, voluminous outerwear and contrasting textures
- **What this will mean for your wardrobe:** Nothing overly complicated, other than a renewed appreciation for real craftsmanship

KENYA HUNT
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The new toy trends for 2014

Last week, more than 1,000 toy manufacturers descended on the Javits Center in New York City to showcase prototypes for the toys that will invade stores later this year. Here, we give the lowdown on the latest toy trends so you'll know what's cool even before your kids will. EMILY LAURENCE

Zombies

Vampires are so last year. This year, zombies have taken over toys — for both boys and girls. Razor Jr. is releasing new scooters for kids ages 3 and up that have oversized zombie hands, which serve as soft, handlebar grips. A line of zombified Disney princesses also will be coming out later this year: Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel, Belle and more all have a new, creepy-cool look.

Science specialty brand Smart Lab is coming out with the Inhuman Squishy Zombie. Kids can take the zombie's organs out, which helps them learn about the human body. It also comes with an educational graphic novel, written by an eighth grade teacher who came up with an entire curriculum based around zombies.

Customizable

This year is all about customization. Hasbro will be releasing My Monopoly, which allows families to customize the board using their Facebook and Instagram photos. There is also a new toy called Super Hero Mashers coming out, which allows kids to create their own superheroes — for example, having Thor's body but the Hulk's hands.

Taking tech to a whole new level

Almost every toy coming out this year has a tech tie-in. Most action figures come with QR codes, which kids can scan using a phone or tablet to unlock a digital game. This month, Crayola released My Virtual Fashion Show, which allows kids to color clothing designs in a paper look book. When they're done, they can scan the pages using a phone or tablet and their designs come to life, with models wearing the looks in a virtual fashion show. Crayola will be releasing a new deluxe version of that toy later this year, just in time for Christmas.

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Horoscope

♓ Pisces | Feb. 19-March 20. You should use discretion when dealing with others today. Many people respect your opinions and will look to you for guidance and advice.

♈ Aries | March 21-April 20. Keep your opinions to yourself. It is not necessary to reveal your secrets. A talk with an old friend may provide inspiration.

♉ Taurus | April 21-May 21. Information you have recently received may have had a negative effect on your life. Dwelling on the issue is not productive.

♊ Gemini | May 22-June 20. You may be tempted by an appealing investment offer. Do your research thoroughly before you commit to anything.

♋ Cancer | June 21-July 22. Have a heart-to-heart discussion with someone who concerns you. Take care to avoid criticism, and offer helpful ideas that will bring you closer to an agreement.

♌ Leo | July 23-Aug. 22. Prepare to focus on business matters today. There is opportunity for advancement if you exceed your employer's expectations.

♍ Virgo | Aug. 23-Sept. 22. Be assertive, and direct your efforts into socializing and networking. Your relationships will improve if you meet someone.

♎ Libra | Sept. 23-Oct. 22. Family and friends may not be totally honest with you. Find someone impartial to provide the answers. A self-improvement project will turn out well.

♏ Scorpio | Oct. 23-Nov. 21. Your commitment and determination will provide you the necessary ingredients to get ahead. Fulfill your obligations.

♐ Sagittarius | Nov. 22-Dec. 21. Consider previous outcomes before taking action. If your methods have worked in the past, there's no need to change.

♑ Capricorn | Dec. 22-Jan 20. Formulate a concrete plan for a discussion. Have a clear idea of your own responsibilities, and consider the expectations of others.

♒ Aquarius | Jan. 21-Feb 18. Your compassion will help others accomplish worthwhile goals. Your good deeds will be reciprocated in an unusual way.

BERNICE BEDE OSOL

Sudoku: Easy and hard

	2				1			
3	1		7			9		
	5	8				6	1	
			5	9				4
	6	7		4		2	3	
4				2	6			
	7	5				8	4	
		2			4		9	5
			9				2	

4		3		1		8		7
			4			3		
	7				5			4
	3		1	4			7	
	4						6	
	9			8	3		2	
5			9				8	
		6			4			
3		7		6		2		9

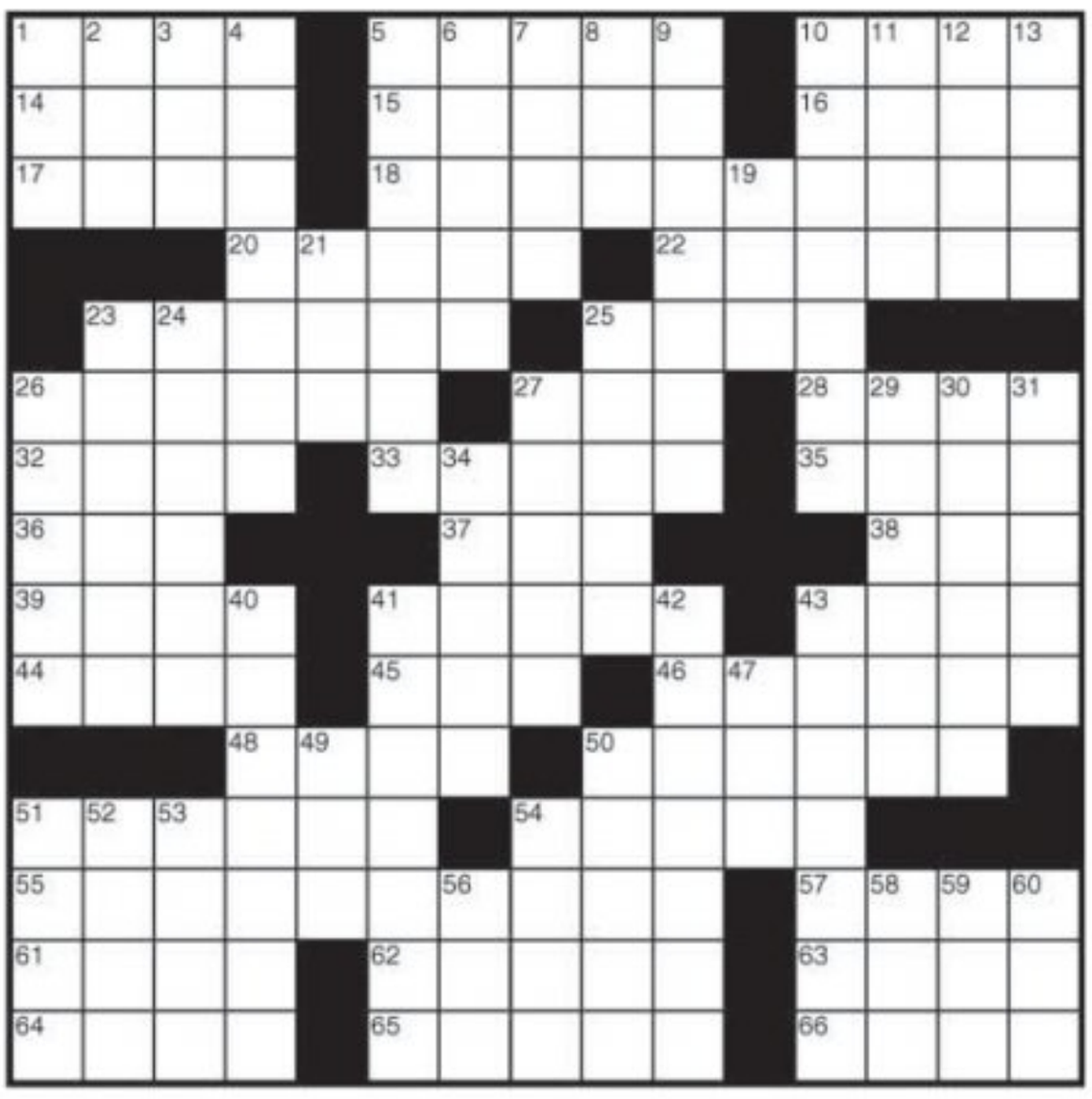
How to play
Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic.

Crossword

Across
1 Pain in the neck
5 Hung open
10 Parroted
14 Barking noises
15 Excuse
16 Lascaux, for one
17 Gold-coated
18 Reef explorer (2 wds.)
20 Black-and-white snacks
22 Current
23 Avila saint
25 Jellystone bear
26 Beach near Los Angeles
27 Egg producer
28 Marched along
32 Indigo plant
33 Entreat
35 Cellist — Ma
36 Finale
37 911 staffer
38 Colo. setting
39 Prez's stand-in
41 Rental contract
43 An evening out
44 Vortex
45 Home page addr.
46 "Silas —"
48 Risque
50 Shooting star
51 Bwana's trek
54 Prepared apples
55 Equivocators
57 Egg on
61 — spumante
62 Keno kin
63 New Age singer
64 Steel- -- boots
65 German industrial center
66 Regard as

Down
1 Vacuum part
2 Jackie's tycoon
3 Super Bowl gp.
4 Resort near Lisbon
5 Makes a pit stop (2 wds.)
6 Bauxite giant
7 Vatican name
8 Diminish
9 Pure carbon
10 What litmus measures
11 Do road work
12 Continuously
13 Bruce or Laura
19 Half-star movie
21 CSA defender
23 No longer pale
24 Skipped syllables
25 Poet W.B. —
26 Ms. Binchy
27 Pertaining to blood
29 Cheese often grated
30 Off-white
31 Granny, often
34 Suspicious
40 Khufu's edifice
41 Kenny Rogers hit
42 Thoreau's friend
43 Coated with flour
47 Gourmandized
49 Still exist
50 -- Carlo
51 Word to a feline
52 Chan rejoinder (2 wds.)
53 Kismet
54 Bunkhouse items
56 Aurora, to Socrates
58 Singleton
59 Yes, to Angus
60 Pond maker

Yesterday's answer



Letters

Do we need a reason to clean up the Earth?

Re: 'Earth in flux' (Metro, Feb. 24) The letter about climate change reminded me of the cartoon where a skeptical member of the audience at a climate change conference says: "What if it is a big hoax and we create a better world for nothing?"

BRIAN BECK, VIA EMAIL

Don't gamble with it, either

Re: 'Earth in flux' (Metro, Feb. 24) To climate change deniers like T. Owens: Why not just "man up" and allow the sacrifices necessary to make our planet a healthier, less polluted world?

The problem I have with all of your arguments is that if history proves you to be wrong — life on Earth as we know it is OVER! Is that a gamble you're willing to make on behalf of your children and grandchildren?

RICHARD FEINBERG, VIA EMAIL

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Cataldi on the Phillies

Phillies should be ashamed of their actions

The Phillies have been accused of many things in their descent from the pinnacle of baseball since 2008 – stupid, short-sighted, reactionary, lost – but no one has ever called them dishonorable. After a shocking story last week, however, that description may soon apply to them as well.

According to many reports, the Phillies violated baseball protocol after failing to sign their fifth and sixth-round draft picks by notifying the NCAA that the two college players were using agents, a major violation.

The speculation is that the Phils were so disappointed when the players rejected their contract offers that they reacted with emotion instead of reason. No such complaint had been filed in 22 years before the Phils did it twice this year.

College players will be reluctant to negotiate with them, agents will be less likely to recommend them, and fans will just see it as the latest example of a team desperately needing new direction – and a new general manager.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, 76ERS' HINKIE HAS PLAN

Sam Hinkie poked his head out last Friday and predicted six more weeks of losing for the Sixers. The big question now is, how can we be sure it won't be six more years of losing?

After a flurry of trade-deadline deals, the GM had no choice but to make his annual appearance, even though he looks every bit as petrified of the bright lights as the legendary groundhog he resembles. As usual, he offered no cause for celebration and little reason for optimism.

Philadelphia has never had a GM like Hinkie, a man with no track record and absolutely no regard for his public image. He has been dynamic in tearing down the decaying mess that the Sixers had become, but he has done almost nothing so far to rebuild it.

For example, at the trade deadline last Thursday, Hinkie swung four deals that flushed away draft bust Evan Turner, mediocre big man Spencer Hawes and useless Lavoy Allen. In return, the GM got a bundle of rejects that promise no help in the immediate future and six largely worthless second-round draft picks. Garbage in, garbage out.

In fact, although Hinkie has received rave reviews for gutting the Sixer roster, he has really brought in only one player who projects as a major contributor, Michael Carter-Williams. Instead, the GM has built up close to $30 million in salary-cap space and stockpiled draft choices. He does appear to have a plan, though he has no interest in sharing any of it with the fans.

On those rare occasions when he does speak, Hinkie is no charmer. He stressed again last week the need to manipulate the bizarre NBA system that encourages teams to fail spectacularly before they rebuild. He's not hiding from the fact that the Sixers will probably lose most of their games for the rest of this already horrific season.

And that's just fine with the people who still care. What isn't so fine is a sports executive who has been shirking a major part of his job, and that's basic communication. If Hinkie doesn't think public speaking is important, he should have a conversation with Joe Banner, the former GM who won big in Philadelphia and is still despised by Eagles fans.

No one is asking the Sixers to reveal the blueprint for their future – if indeed there is one – but fans need something more tangible than an annual appearance by the socially awkward architect of the team to rekindle their interest.

Thanks to the pitiful work of roster butchers Ed Stefanski, Tony DiLeo and Doug Collins, the bar is low for Sam Hinkie. All he needs to do right now is to talk to the fans, give them some reason to believe he's better than the losers who preceded him. Is that really asking too much?

Sixers general manager Sam Hinkie orchestrated the trades of Evan Turner, Spencer Hawes and Lavoy Allen last week. / GETTY IMAGES

The Voice of Philly Sports

ANGELO CATALDI
LETTERS@METRO.US

3 SPORTS

Vick to Jets?

Reports say Jets interested in Vick

According to NFL.com insider Ian Rapoport, the Jets are a "legitimate" destination for the dynamic Eagles quarterback. Rapoport cites the presence of former Eagles coordinator Marty Mornhinweg in New York, as well as their wide open quarterback situation as reasons why Vick could sign with the Jets before the start of the 2014 season.

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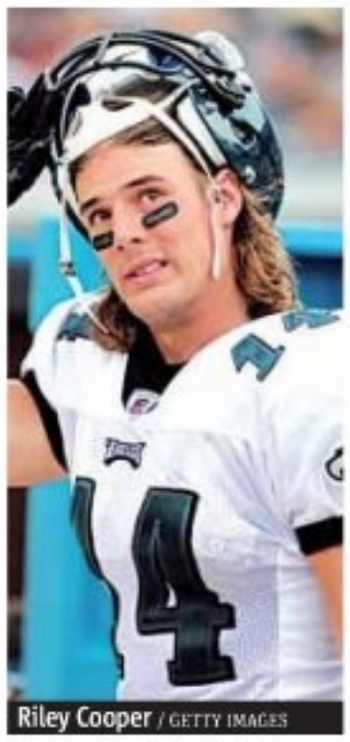
Cataldi on the Eagles

Eagles should choose Cooper over Maclin

After a magical season and two extra months of quiet satisfaction, the Eagles are about to make their first major mistake of the offseason. They appear poised to choose Jeremy Maclin over Riley Cooper in the quandary over free-agent wide receivers. They will regret this.

A year ago, Maclin was so far ahead of Cooper on the depth chart, there would have been no debate at all. Maclin was more accomplished in every area — catches, receiving yards, touchdowns. He was a productive partner for DeSean Jackson, and a class act, to boot. Meanwhile, Cooper was fighting for a spot on the roster, and soon would be trying to survive an ugly racial incident.

Then fate intervened. Maclin tore his ACL and required reconstructive surgery, while Cooper was overseeing a reconstruction project of his own, emerging as new quarterback Nick Foles' favorite target. Foles' most impressive stats last season were 29 touchdown passes and only two interceptions. No teammate was more helpful in compiling those amazing numbers than Cooper.


Riley Cooper / GETTY IMAGES

The Eagles have insisted that the racial issue is no factor at all in appraising the two players, but what other reasoning could place Maclin's value about Cooper's? How can the Eagles even be sure that Maclin will have his same speed and agility after his second major knee surgery? What makes them think Foles will develop the same chemistry with Maclin that he had with Cooper?

By all accounts, the market for Cooper will be more competitive than for Maclin, because of the injury. Two weeks before the free-agency period begins, New England has already been identified as one of his main suitors. The Eagles need to make a preemptive strike right now and sign Cooper, baggage be damned. He gives them a better chance to win next season. It's that simple.

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Idle thoughts

- Miguel Alfredo Gonzalez agreed to a $48 million deal with the Phillies last summer, had that number dropped to $12 million after flunking his physical and has been a bust so far in Clearwater. How could the Phillies be so wrong about the Cuban pitcher? A better question: How many more blunders like this does GM Ruben Amaro Jr. get to make?
- Carlos Ruiz finally got a prescription for Adderall, the drug he was taking illegally during his best season with the Phillies in 2012. Why didn't the Phillies get him back on the medication — legally this time — until after his batting average had dropped from .325 to .268 last season?
- The Don Tollefson story just keeps getting worse. The former TV broadcaster was arrested last week and charged with bilking more than 100 victims of more than $100,000. If the allegations are true that he used his fame to con Philadelphia sports fans, he needs to spend some time in prison.
- A movement is afoot to have legendary Philadelphia writer Bill Conlin ousted from the Baseball Hall of Fame after allegations of sex abuse by members of his own family. Since Conlin made no attempt to clear his name — as he had promised — before his death in January, he is no longer worthy of the honor.
- Sports fans, you may resume your normal lives. The Olympics are over.

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Phillies' new broadcast team brings energy

MLB. Jamie Moyer and Matt Stairs are excited to bring knowledge and humor to the Philly airwaves.

Jamie Moyer will be behind the mic Wednesday instead of his more established spring training location, the pitching mound. / GETTY IMAGES

New Phillies' color commentators Jamie Moyer and Matt Stairs chatted with the media Monday, two days prior to their first broadcast, Wednesday at 1 p.m.

And just as if they were in the bullpen warming up, or on deck circle taking cuts, the duo was anxious to start their next baseball endeavor.

"When I got the opportunity to get the job and I was at the mic, I started to get a little nervous and my stomach was rolling around a little bit," Stairs said on Monday. "It's going to be fun. It's going to be a blast."

Moyer and Stairs will join Tom McCarthy for 30 games as a trio, and will individually appear in 109 and 108 games respectively, including spring training.

And for Moyer, it is a chance to join the ranks of the local broadcasters he grew up listening to, like Richie Ashburn and Harry Kalas.

"I hear their voices as we all do as fans," Moyer said. "Whether it was an exciting game or just their voice or how they talked about the game or broadcast the game. I don't see any way that I'm going to try to emulate those people. I think they were all great in their own respect."

EVAN MACY
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Union brotherhood

Union trade for Chicago Fire defenseman

In their continued quest to build a championship soccer squad, the Philadelphia Union acquired Chicago Fire defender Austin Berry in exchange for allocation money.

The terms of the deal were not immediately released, but the Union do accumulate one of Chicago's defensive anchors in the deal.

"Austin is a talented central defender that will add quality to our back line," team manager John Hackworth said. "We think he is the right fit to help strengthen our central defense." METRO

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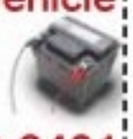

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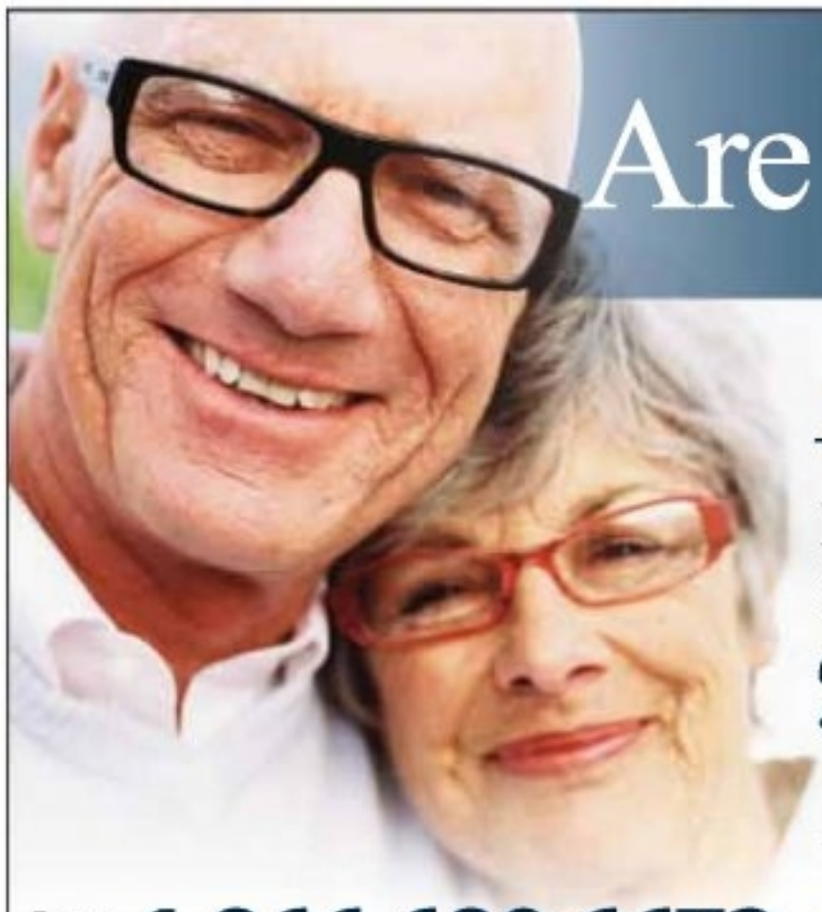

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